

**Opinion on the Dissertation of Rumen Skrinski, "Vasil Levski in Fiction and Documentary Cinema: Narratives and Interpretations", submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"**

My perception of the scientific merits of Rumen Skrinsky's dissertation stems from my impressions as his lecturer during his studies in the Cultural Studies Department. During these years I was able to witness his focus, consistency and steadfastness in the acquisition of knowledge, to witness the development of his capacity for scholarly work; I am happy to find now that this path he has followed, which was also continued during his PhD, presents him convincingly through the work under discussion as a formed and talented cultural historian.

The chosen topic characterizes his work as a historical study – a composition with no previous scientific elaborations on the content and context of the specific scientific subject mastered by the dissertant and the historical circumstances related to it. However, to define the overall text as historical research alone would be incomplete. His dissertation goes decisively beyond the usual factual reconstructions of the past, revealing Levski from documentary and fiction cinema in our country in a cultural-historical perspective, analyzing through it the contradictions in the Bulgarian public of the twentieth and early decades of the twenty-first century and, in this context, the confronting narratives and interpretations related to the personality, work, testaments, death and immortality of the Apostle. A complex cultural process, as the author notes, with a clear beginning but no finale, a process without an end, in which the visualizations of verbal descriptions, opinions and public collisions in artistic and documentary tapes bring further specific multidimensional complications.

After the assessment of the importance of the topic comes the question of sources. Skrinsky discovers and isolates the visual archive of information that is precisely appropriate for his work. It is in direct relation to the cultural and historical construction and conceptualization of the subject, presenting authentic and unknown source material, while taking a critical, detached stance towards it regarding a number of generally accepted exaggerations and deliberate media manipulations of the available documentation, literature and films related to the personality and work of the great revolutionary.

In this respect I would express my incomprehension as to why a complete “filmography” is missing, and I would recommend as a must, before the bibliography presented, that the author provides a complete list of it, a kind of systematic appearance of his basic sources with an exhaustive description of the films brought and analyzed in the dissertation, the writers, directors, film crews, their duration, the years of their appearance, statistics on the number of their broadcasts, their distribution, reviews in current periodicals, etc.

The structure of the study under discussion is the result of Skrinsky's in-depth knowledge and understanding of both the magnitude and significance of the visualisation of narratives as a cultural phenomenon in their own right, and of their place in the political and cultural context of the decades. The internal divisions of the study are delineated according to his understandings of the transformations of narratives in the face of cultural change over time, through the power of ideological imperatives, propagandistic means and tools, and resistance to them, and through the institutional and social history of cinema in this country and the successive expansion of its public functions. In the same connection, his thesis on the autonomization of visual narratives from verbal narratives should be emphasized, a thesis that could bear further development in his research.

The reconstruction and analytical work achieved by the author goes decisively beyond the concreteness of the testimonies and unfolds new storylines in the major themes of cinema and cultural identity, of the reverse use of visualizations of available verbal narratives in current politics, thus giving an independent, new, unique perspective to understand them; this, I think, is the most direct evidence of the high professionalism he has achieved.

I would also add to my opinion the good impressions of the dissertant's self-assessment of his own contributions. Rumen Skrinski defends what he has done with clear understanding. He provides convincing arguments that justify the new research perspective he has outlined. The abstract can be accepted as a representative piece of his work - conducted in the style of the exposition of the main work, it takes in a concentrated form and gives an accurate picture of the broad source basis of the research and the analytical techniques conducted in it, an accurate picture of the depth and significance of the final conclusions.

The dissertation is undoubtedly an achievement, a study with significant contributions; therefore, and with full conviction in the concluding words of my opinion, I urge the esteemed Scientific Jury to vote "YES" without hesitation to award Rumen Skrinski the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

**Prof. Ivan Elenkov, D.Sc.**

5<sup>th</sup> of March 2023

Sofia